

AR1ACT Proposal

The ACT

The ACT tests the academic knowledge, skills, and reasoning necessary for success in college.

The new Common Core standards, consistent with ACT standards, emphasize the reasoning component, implicitly recognizing a relative weakness among students in this area.

We have long found that this is the component most lacking in students' approach to the ACT. That is, their knowledge and skills, though not optimal themselves, are sufficient to score higher, but their scores are held back due to a failure to apply knowledge and skills through reasoning to their full potential on the test. (See Appendix 1.)

The ACT is selective in the information it requires students to know. But it requires them to know this selection very well. It also demands a high level of academic skill in the areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic. And, again, it requires active and sustained reasoning to use this set of knowledge and skills most effectively.

The ACT helps schools and policy makers around the country in the mission of college readiness by measuring students' performance. Our complementary approach is to help students directly by showing them how to hone their abilities to score closer to their potential on the ACT.

Our goals

As the title of our proposed program implies, our immediate goal is to raise the average ACT score of public school Arkansans measurably in the first year and to continue to raise this average over subsequent years.

We know how ambitious this goal is, but we are confident we can achieve it, due to the unique set of expertise, resources, methodology, and delivery system we can provide. What we are proposing has not been attempted before (see History of Test Prep in AR below), so it is important not to measure our proposal only against previous efforts.

By honing students reading, writing, arithmetic, reasoning, and test taking skills and thereby raising their ACT scores, we expect the following collateral benefits:

1. Enabling students to gain admission to more colleges and universities and to earn more in scholarships at those institutions.
2. Reducing the rate of remediation in colleges and universities in Arkansas.
3. Increasing the rate of completion of postsecondary education in Arkansas.
4. Reducing the time of completion of postsecondary education in Arkansas.

5. Improving students' performance in Arkansas colleges and universities.
6. Improving college students' ability to choose and plan for careers and jobs.
7. Improving college graduates' ability to compete capably for jobs.
8. Improving college graduates' abilities and success rates in their jobs (through improved reading, writing, arithmetic, reasoning, and problem solving skills).
9. Increasing productivity and enable economic savings in Arkansas through the improvements above.

(We estimate that 1 point improvement on the ACT is worth about \$3 million to the state.)

Our people

Our group consists of four Arkansas educators: Steve Leake, Charity Smith, Victor Haislop, and Anthony Gagliardo.

Steve has trained students for the ACT for 30 years, half that time with The Princeton Review and half independently. Charity has trained students for 20 years for the ACT and served as President of the Arkansas ACT Council and national facilitator for states' implementation of the universal ACT. Victor is a professor of Spanish at UALR with 20 years' teaching experience. Anthony is an engineer by training who ran the Sylvan Learning Center in Little Rock for 10 years.

Steve, Victor, and Anthony established Edsortium.com three years ago, an online live and interactive training platform on which Steve has helped students around the country raise ACT scores.

The four principals have formed a partnership dedicated to the AR1ACT proposal.

History of ACT Prep in Arkansas

The ACT originated in 1959 as an alternative to the SAT. Arkansas, like many Southeastern and Midwestern States, became an early and constant adopter of the ACT.

For many years, students in Arkansas and around the nation had few options to prepare for the ACT (or SAT). Stanley Kaplan was the earliest well-known preparer for standardized tests in the U.S. in the 50's. In 1980 The Princeton Review both rode and helped to enlarge a wave of interest in SAT and ACT test preparation around the country. This wave started on the coasts and swept into the South a few years later. By 1990, college-bound students in the South were beginning to seek professional help in ACT/SAT preparation in large numbers: either from Kaplan, Princeton Review, Sylvan Learning Center or individual tutors.

In the wake of this wave, many private and public schools began to feel the pressure from students and parents to provide in-house prep for the SAT and ACT. In the mid-90's, schools around the country began to put together their own school-based test prep services: the models varied from actual course electives, to weekend seminars, to summer courses, to in-class modules in English, Math, and Science classes.

It became obvious after a couple of years, however, that these in-school services were of rather limited efficacy. There certainly was no negative impact on the business of test prep companies; if anything, their success grew.

For a number of years, the Arkansas Dept. of Education has offered a summer-long ACT course (CPEP course) free to lower performing students. This provided 70 hours of test prep over the summer. Statistically, the program earned an average of 2 points improvement for those who maintained attendance. In comparison, Kaplan and Sylvan (and, in other states, Princeton Review) achieved about this level of improvement in half as many hours. To be fair, CPEP targets lower performing students, a pool that is predictably more difficult to help.

Another prep program that has been offered in the last several years is Arkansas Works. This has targeted the 21 most underserved counties in the state. Specifically it has trained student in college and career preparation, including ACT prep. It has reached approximately 850 students per year, mostly during the summer, but also during the year. It has also seen an improvement of about 2 points.

Students today are left with limited in-school test prep, limited access to CPEP and Arkansas Works, and professional test prep companies that seem to be struggling in recent years, while continuing to charge students hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Our approach

In order to raise the ACT state average, we propose to reach virtually every public school student in one or more of several ways:

1. Live online interactive training made available every week throughout the year. Currently Steve teaches online twice a week, Thursday and Sunday nights, 7:30-9:00 pm on the Edsortium site. AR1ACT students may join this class or similar classes offered at different times. In this way, every public school student in Arkansas with access to a computer and the internet would be able to prepare twice a week for the ACT year-round with an expert of 30 years' experience.
2. A hard copy and/or online version of "The Skinny," an online guide to the ACT by Steve.
3. A copy of Steve's ACT DVD and/or the DVD streamed online.
4. In-person seminars hosted by Steve and Charity at selected high schools year-round in Arkansas.

5. ACT Clubs set up in high schools, led by high scoring students under the direction of Steve and Charity (see Appendix 2.)

Steve's approach to the ACT can be summed up as the One-Six Approach: One Strategy, Six techniques. The rest is practice and reinforcement. This approach is set forth in *The Skinny*, Steve's DVD, and online at CollegePrepCoachLittleRock.com, the site for Steve's local "bricks and mortar" class in West Little Rock, and Edsortium.com, our national ACT online prep site.

The goal is to train all public high school students in Arkansas in the One/Six approach and to provide constant reinforcement and practice in this approach.

Charity's approach can be summed up as teaching students to follow reason and evidence wherever they may lead, a systematic approach to problem solving, and confidence in reasoning.

The approach may seem simplistic, but it is not. It certainly is *simple*, however, and that is the point. In math in school and on the ACT, students are asked to "simplify." That means solve by making more complex expressions simpler. The secret to test taking and to all problem solving is simplifying: making what appears complex simpler.

The strategy ("One") is to recognize how simple the test really is and approach it that way. The techniques ("Six") allow students to implement that strategy (2 on English, 2 on Math, 1 on Reading, and 1 on Science).

The One/Six approach would fit on a postcard. We want that postcard mentally ingrained in the minds of all public school students. We also want them to practice that approach as much as possible.

Then, we want them to go in and take the ACT two or three times a year. It may not be possible for all students to do this, but it is a goal to aim for. Those who can't afford the sign-up fees may be provided waivers by the test company.

If we can get a student to do this, we can raise his or her score not one, but several points. If we can get most students to do this, we certainly can achieve a significant improvement state-wide.

Why Us?

There are many ACT trainers and ACT companies in the nation. Why us?

For a number of reasons:

1. Steve is, as far as we know, the most experienced ACT trainer in the world (30 years.)
2. Charity is close behind with 20 years' experience teaching the ACT, but is also an expert on the construction and "Standards" of the test as former President of the Arkansas ACT

Council and national universal ACT facilitator.

3. No other organization or individual, to our knowledge, operates a live, interactive, online program training students for the ACT.
4. Steve's approach is unique and uniquely effective. Charity's is complementary, adding strategic and tactical overlays to Steve's approach.
5. All four of us are Arkansans.

For all of these reasons, we are uniquely suited to accomplishing the goal we have set out to achieve: raising the average ACT score in Arkansas.

Efficacy of the Program

Steve's average improvement over the years is 2-5 points for all students. That is, 75% fall within that range of improvement. For those who take the test multiple times with multiple doses of preparation with Steve, the range improves to 5-8 points. Charity's improvements are similar. A sample class of 150 students hosted by Lyon College 2 years ago in which Steve taught 5 two-hour sessions over 3 days that resulted in an average increase of about 3 points. A compilation of the sample's results are attached.

Appendix 1

Reasoning

For example, a student may be able to recite the Pythagorean Theorem, and might be able to answer the most straightforward version of a question involving it. But that student might not recognize the applicability of the Theorem to a question in which a right triangular relationship is implied, not outright stated.

Similarly, a student might understand generally the concept of Parallel Construction in English Grammar, but not recognize that such parallelism obtains for all parts of speech, or that a word commonly thought of as a verb (e.g, "run") might have a noun form or gerund ("running") that would impact their decision on a question involving Parallelism.

On a Reading question involving an inference or a Science question involving an extrapolation of a graph, a student might understand the literal words of the Reading question and the figures on the Science graph, but not understand that he or she is expected to make a logical jump. Our approach to ACT preparation emphasizes the reasoning component. To be sure, we address knowledge and skills, but our focus is on training students to hone and employ their reasoning ability.

This approach is not a common one; indeed, almost all test preparation relies on familiarity and

repetition. These are helpful, to be sure. And virtually any test prep is better than no test prep. But optimal results cannot be obtained unless students are trained to think better on the test. The ACT, after all, is a thinking test. And only in this way can a student develop from a dependent learner to an independent learner, which will allow him or her to thrive in college.

Appendix 2

School Clubs

While we expect all of the components of our comprehensive program to be effective, in some ways the most compelling is the founding of ACT college prep clubs in all Arkansas high schools. Under the mentorship of both Steve and Charity, the ACT clubs will not only facilitate and foster a culture of academic excellence, but will also be directly beneficial to all learners. Lower scoring students will benefit from the low-filter feedback of their peers in a no-pressure, fun environment and have the opportunity to practice at length so as to master the content and strategies imparted by Steve and Charity.

The higher scorers will cement their knowledge by acquiring extra practice and thinking through the test more deeply. (As is often said, “You don’t know really know something unless you can teach it.”) In addition, high scoring students will be able to write college application letters highlighting their community service. Another benefit is that the leaders of these clubs will help spread the word and “sell” the idea of preparing for the test--and the even more important idea of a successful life beyond secondary school.

We envision monthly meetings throughout the year with an uptick in activity two weeks before each test. Students might be rewarded with simple but emblematic awards: e.g., badges or patches for every 2-point increase over a previous test and for other milestones.

Success is contagious, and these clubs may well be the catalyst for students to start taking the ACT more seriously and to ponder their futures beyond high school.